

NATIONAL BASEBALL HALL OF FAME

**Moderator: Jon Shestakofsky
December 4, 2016
7:15 pm CT**

Operator: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for standing by and welcome to the National Baseball Hall of Fame conference call. During the presentation, all participants will be in a listen only mode. Afterwards, we'll conduct a question and answer session. At that time, if you have a question, please press the 1 followed by the 4 on your telephone. As a reminder, this conference is being recorded Sunday, December 4, 2016. And I would now like to turn the conference over to Jon Shestakofsky. Please go ahead. Please go ahead.

Jon Shestakofsky: Hello, everyone, and welcome to the National Baseball Hall of Fame conference call with Vice Chairman of the Atlanta Braves, John Schuerholz. My name of Jon Shestakofsky, Vice President of Communications and Education at the Hall of Fame.

As you know, within the last hour, it was announced on MLB Network that he and Commissioner Selig have been elected to the Hall of Fame via the today's game era ballot. Congratulations to you, Mr. Schuerholz. These men will formally be inducted into the Hall of Fame on Sunday, July 30, along with any other electees that may join them from the BBWA ballot, which will be announced on MLB Network at 6:00 pm on Wednesday, January 18.

Before we open up for questions, I will turn it over now to Mr. Schuerholz, who will make an opening statement.

John Schuerholz: Well, thank you so much, Jon, and all of you on this call. I appreciate your interest in being here and listening to this astonishment that you hear in my voice and this pride and honor that you hear in my voice for this ultimate of honors in our game. In my 51 years, I always had aspirations to be a successful general manager and to build winning teams. And we were able to do that and do it for a while and consistently. But this honor is almost - it puts me in a position where I seldom am and that is to be without words to adequately describe what this means to me.

And I know many of the Hall of Famers. I've seen them perform. I've become friends with some. But never in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine that someone would pick up the phone, Jane Forbes Clark, and say, Mr. Schuerholz -- actually she called me John -- congratulations. Good news. I want to let you know you have been elected into Major League Baseball's Hall of Fame.

Those words will ring in my ears and in my brain for the rest of my life. And I can't tell you how thrilled I am. So if anyone has a question for me, I'm happy to give it a try to answer.

Operator: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. If you'd like to register for a question, you may press the 1 followed by the 4 on your telephone. You will hear a three-tone prompt to acknowledge your request. If your question has been answered and you would like to withdraw the registration, you may press the 1 followed by the 3. Again, to register for a question, please press the 1 followed by the 4.

Our first question comes from the line of Eduardo Encino with Baltimore Sun.
Please go ahead.

Eduardo Encino: Hi, John. Congratulations. I just want to ask you - I know that you've probably been asked a few times about the letter you wrote to Jerry Hoffberger 50 years ago about getting into the business. And I was just wondering, on a day like today do you think about that and how, you know, your path, you know, being a Baltimore native, and just kind of, you know, took that turn into now what you can call a Hall of Fame career?

John Schuerholz: Well, thank you, Eduardo. That is a great question. Yes, I was a teacher teaching third grade English and World Geography. And in a free period I decided to write a letter to the owner of the Baltimore Orioles, Jerold Hoffberger, who passed it on Frank Cashen, who was then the President. And then it went to Harry Dalton, the General Manager, and then down to Lou Gorman, who had just been promoted to the Director of Player Development.

And fast forward a bit, after an interview process, they offered me the job. And I became a Baltimore Oriole. After having had my life's dream of being a Major League Baseball player, I came to a reckoning about that and realized that the scouts were more right than I was. Their evaluation of my ability was better than my evaluation of my ability.

So I started with the Orioles in 1966 and that began this wonderful career path for me. And I've been so blessed to have the opportunity initially and to work with so many great and talented people along the way and kept my ears and eyes open and tried to learn from the greatest and the best. And here I am 51 years later being told that I've been selected to be inducted into Baseball's Hall of Fame. It all started with that letter during a free period in North Point Junior High School in Baltimore, Maryland.

Eduardo Encino: Thank you.

Operator: Thank you. Our next question comes from the line of Mark Bowman with MLB.com. Please go ahead.

Mark Bowman: John, we've heard Bobby talk about the day he got the call. He saw the area code and he kind of got nervous at that point. Can you kind of tell us what you were doing at the moment the call came and your reaction and how that compares to some of the, maybe the moment that you saw a World Series clinched?

John Schuerholz: Well, I have to be honest, Mark. I was the benefactor of that circumstance that Bobby endured where he saw the area code and didn't recognize it and didn't take the call. But Brad Hainje was with me and said, you know, I think you should answer this call. Of course, I did. And it was Jane Forbes Clark, who on the other end of the line, said to me that she was happy to inform me that I had been elected into Baseball's Hall of Fame.

And, you know, I'm not often speechless. But at that time, I was and told her how proud and honored and thrilled I was to be welcomed into such an august group and body and the highest pinnacle of success and recognition in baseball. And now they've invited me to be a part of that? And then afterward to get calls from friends of mine and people that I know, Al Kaline and Joe Torry, and Pat Gillick and on and on and on. My heart is beating at a different pace than it has for many, many years.

Mark Bowman: Thank you.

Operator: Thank you. Our next question comes from the line of David O'Brien with Atlanta Journal Constitution. Please go ahead.

David O'Brien: Congratulations, John.

John Schuerholz: Hey, David. Thank you.

David O'Brien: How special will it be, or how much more - I mean, I guess it's hard to make it even more special. But when so soon after Bobby and the big three pitchers did and obviously, they'll all be there and you were just up there for all of their inductions, how much more special will that make it?

John Schuerholz: Well, remarkably so for me because, you know, I have great respect and admiration for our Hall of Famers, especially the recent inductees, and of course, Phil Niekro, and all of the others in the Braves organization. But that special group that I had a chance to work with and be with made it a thrill for me to go to Cooperstown and watch those guys get inducted and honored in the manner so fitting for their great contributions to the game for so consistent a long period of time and to know that Chipper Jones will hopefully someday be considered in that regard.

But the special thing for me is to have had this wonderful partnership with a man, as you know well, who not only is brilliant as a baseball mind but as good a human being and a caring person as Bobby Cox is. And to have worked with him as general manager and manager and to now know that I get to join he and the others who have been recognized from our organization is a thrill and an honor beyond words and beyond belief. And I have such admiration for Bobby and such a wonderful relationship and friendship with him. And so I'm especially honored by that uniqueness of that and I'll celebrate that for the rest of my life.

David O'Brien: Thanks, John.

John Schuerholz: Thanks, David.

Operator: Thank you. Our next question comes from the line of Bruce Levine with cbschicago.com. Please go ahead.

Bruce Levine: John, congratulations.

John Schuerholz: Thank you, Bruce.

Bruce Levine: I want you to talk about how you were able to maneuver through different ownerships and different salary, you know, caps for you to be able to spend and still be successful. I think that was maybe one of the great untold stories about your success and your organization's success that after Mr. Turner left, you didn't have much money to operate yet you kept being successful.

John Schuerholz: Well, I didn't have to maneuver. I had owners from the very beginning when I became general manager in Kansas City in '81 and before that even as the director of player development. They were supportive. They believed in what my vision was for that organization. And the people that were there working side by side with me and scouting and player development, the Major League club, the managers, and so they were supportive.

And I understood the reality of budgeting. And I understood the challenges of small market budgets. And so we just worked well and worked together. And the people who were with me understood what our vision and what our goals were. And we worked together and we got the job done.

It didn't always have to be spending the most money. For me it was always creating the best fabric of an organization and a fabric of a Major League team, so the blending of the various elements and abilities and personalities in winning spirit of people to become parts of your team. And we were able to win, not because we had the most money to spend, but because we had the right plan. We had the right people. And we worked well together. And we accomplished just remarkable things.

And this recognition today is, I guess, a testimony not only to myself as perhaps the leader of that, but all of those people, every one of them, who stood shoulder to shoulder to help me to get to the point where we would build winning team after winning team after winning team. And, of course, the capstone in Atlanta when we won 14 consecutive division championships and a World Series in 1995, that was the highlight. But there was a lot of great highlights in my life and in my career.

Bruce Levine: Congratulations, John, and all the best to you.

John Schuerholz: Thank you.

Operator: Thank you. Our next question comes from the line of Barry Bloom, with MLB.com. Please go ahead.

Barry Bloom: Hey, John, congratulations, man.

John Schuerholz: Hi, Barry. Thank you.

Barry Bloom: Back to, you know, Dave's question. What does it say for what you guys did in that organization that you're going to wind up with a general manager or manager and probably four players off of that team in the Hall of Fame and

how you put that team together through draft picks and trades and, you know, stops and starts, to be one of the greatest in history?

John Schuerholz: Well, you know, it's a unique story, I'll say. And to be a part of that unique story where a general manager is now invited to become a member of the Hall of Fame along with an already well-established and iconic and beloved and admired manager like Bobby Cox and such star caliber, Hall of Fame caliber players.

We did it, not just be having Hall of Fame players and high level ability players, but we managed to have on average 10 new players a year come into that organization and to blend with those leaders, those all-star and hall of fame caliber players who were leading the way and made it easier for the new players that we brought in on average 10 per year during that great run of 14 consecutive division championships. And we were able to sustain it.

I mean, I've always said it's easy to build a championship team, but it's very, very difficult and challenging to sustain it and to work side by side with a man the caliber of Bobby Cox and a great leader and a great inspirational leader and a man so well respected as he. And the great relationship that he and I built and enjoyed for so many years, it made it a lot easier, I'll tell you that. And to have great players like we've had. And the scouting and player development department and administrative people and such that as support staff, it made it easier. It wasn't ever easy, but it made it easier to have that kind of people - excuse me, that caliber of people around me each and every year.

Barry Bloom: Well, congratulations again. And I'll see you tomorrow.

John Schuerholz: Thank you. Appreciate it.

Operator: Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, as a reminder, to register for a question, please press the 1 followed by the 4. Our next question comes from the line of Bob Knightengale with USA Today. Please go ahead

Bob Knightengale: Hey, John. Congratulations.

John Schuerholz: Hey, Bob. Thank you.

Bob Knightengale: Of all your accomplishments, John, so many regard the fact that you guys won 14 straight division championships, is that number 1 in your book? Is that over either World Series in Kansas City or Atlanta?

John Schuerholz: Well, that's a tough question. It's like the question which of your children to you love the most? You know, I was honored to be the general manager of a world championship team in Kansas City in '85. And then come to Atlanta and win another world championship in '95. And then be the first general manager to win a world championship in both the American and National League. And, of course, it's now been done by Pat Gillick, a great general manager Hall of Famer, and recently Theo Epstein.

They're all great, Bob. And it's hard to say one trumps the other. I loved building teams. As you know, I loved working with people to try to work with challenging budgets and build teams that could win and sustain it. And we were able to do that.

And again, I keep saying, with people like Dick Howser in Kansas City, and the great leadership and mentorship that I received from Frank Cashen and Harry Dalton and Lou Gorman. And then to have the chance ultimately to partner with a man like Bobby Cox, who you guys all know, you know, as

well as I do, and what he is, and the kind of guy he is, and for he and I to partner as effectively as we did. It's all a remarkable high point in my life. And I'm proud of those accomplishments and none of which I'm more proud of than today's honor of being invited to join these great players and these great managers and coaches and executives in the Hall of Fame of Baseball.

Bob Knightengale: Okay. Thanks, John. Congratulations. We'll see you tomorrow.

John Schuerholz: Thank you so much, Bob.

Operator: Thank you. Our next question comes from the line of (Robert Grayson) with Sport Profiles. Please go ahead.

(Robert Grayson): Yes. Congratulations. What impact do you think it had on you? You mentioned earlier about you had a dream to be a ballplayer. And you didn't play in the Majors. What kind of impact did that have on you being an executive? I mean, did that influence you in how you selected players and (unintelligible) your team.

John Schuerholz: I'm sorry. I was always aspirational. I was always aspirational in whatever it was that I was doing. As an eighth grade English and World Geography teacher, I wanted to be the best. And I tried to prepare myself to do that. And when my chance came to get into baseball with the Baltimore Orioles in 1966, I knew that I had to work hard and keep my eyes and ears open and learn from people and have a work ethic that was appropriately required and expected. And I did that.

And I have a natural, I guess you would say, capability or human quality that I got along with people well. And I communicated with people honestly and forthrightly. And they knew where I stood and how I felt and what we needed.

And then all along the way, as I said a moment ago, to end up partnering with people the caliber of Dick Howser and Joe Burke, the then president who made me general manager -- at age 41, by the way -- in 1981 at 41 I was the youngest general manager in baseball at that time. And now at 41, they're looking for your keys and inviting you to leave, you know, leave the room so some, you know, 27, 28, 30 year old comes in. But I was so blessed to be in organizations that were well structured, had great leadership at ownership level and believed and trusted in what vision and plan that I had and supported it more than anything.

And I'll never forget a conversation that I had with Mr. Ewing Kauffman one day. He called me to his office and I said what's going on here? And I went into his office. I sat down. And he was in his chair facing the other way. He turned around and looked at me with his steely blue eyes. And he said it was a bad deal that I had made. And he reminded me, he said, look, that deal didn't work out for you, but do not lose your aggressiveness. Do not lose your incentive. Do not lose your imagination. We trust you. You're our man. Keep working. And I had that all along in my career, those kind of people as my leaders, as my bosses, as people who had faith in me. And it continued to drive me.

(Robert Grayson): And I wanted to also ask you, in your wildest imaginations, when you came to the Braves, did you think you could turn it around that fast?

John Schuerholz: No. But here's a great story about that. My first year with the Braves was '91, hired in the winter of 1990. Fast forward to spring training of 1991, we had signed Terry Pendleton as a free agent. Rafael Belliard, Sid Bream, and then later Mike Heath then made a deal for Otis Nixon that spring training.

But in that spring training, Terry Pendleton walks up to me. And we're behind batting cage on the Minor League side, and he says, John, we're going to have a lot of fun around here this year. Terry was a pretty good scout. He could see what we had. He could see the mix that we had. And I believe that we had a chance with these guys. These guys felt that way. And Bobby was leading the pack. We had a chance. And it happened. And it continued to happen for years and years and years.

(Robert Grayson): Thank you very much.

John Schuerholz: Thank you.

Operator: Thank you again, ladies and gentlemen. To register for a question, please press the 1 followed by the 4 on your question. One moment please.

We have a follow-up question from the line of (Robert Grayson) with Sports Profiles. Please go ahead.

(Robert Grayson): Yes. If you don't mind, a follow-up on what you just talked about. When you were in Kansas City, you win the World Series, do you have that feeling? I mean, you go out there, of course you want to win again, but do you ever have that feeling that could be the only one?

John Schuerholz: No. We did not. I mean, we had the pipeline filled with quality players in Kansas City like I learned how to do it in Baltimore, like we did ultimately. Actually we started before I got there when Bobby Cox was general manager. They began to reset the organization. And when I came there to take over as general manager, a lot of the foundation work was done. And we just built upon that and built upon that.

It was unique that Bobby and I had such similar organizational building philosophies from homegrown players, scouting, player development. And I didn't think in Kansas City that when we won in 1985 that it would be the last one. Nor did I think in 1995 that it would have been the only one or the last one because we had a pipeline of talent, young players that scouts were finding and player development people were developing.

And they were matriculating through the pipeline at steady stream, and steady state. And that's the way we were able to operate in small market and modest comparatively payrolls to keep winning and keep competing and keep winning. We did it that way. We did it with homegrown players. And it's the secret sauce in our business.

And I was blessed more than I can tell you to have people that knew how to scout, knew how to develop players. And when they got to the Major Leagues, managers who knew how to blend them and make them win as a team. So that's my career.

(Robert Grayson): Okay. And while I have you, one other thing. Did you expect your letter to get answered when you wrote it?

John Schuerholz: You know, I didn't. But here's a behind the scenes story. I don't know if you know about this. But when I wrote the letter, and it went from Jerold Hoffberger's hand to Frank Cashen's hand. Frank Cashen, as you may know, was at one-time a sports writer in Baltimore, Maryland.

And he said to Harry Dalton when he took the letter to him, he said, I don't know this guy from Adam. But I know this family, this sporting family, the Schuerholz family. He comes from great stock. We ought to talk to him.

And so my last name, more than anything I, any flowery words and explanations I gave in my letter, it was the fact that my last name was reflective of a great athletic family from Baltimore that got me in the door. And the rest of it, I guess I said the right thing a couple times to a couple of questions asked of me.

(Robert Grayson): All right. Thank you.

John Schuerholz: You're welcome.

Operator: Thank you. At this time, Mr. Shestakofsky, there are no further questions. I will now turn the call back over to you.

Jon Shestakofsky: Thank you. Mr. Schuerholz, thank you so much for joining us on this historic day. Once again, we congratulate you on your election to the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

John Schuerholz: Thank you so much, Jon. I'm honored and thrilled and so proud.

Jon Shestakofsky: I'd like to note Mr. Schuerholz and Commissioner Emeritus Bud Selig will be available to media in person here at the winter meeting tomorrow at 11:00 a.m. Eastern Time at the Gaylord Convention Center in the Woodrow Wilson Ballroom. Please also note that a transcript of this call as well as the preceding call with Commissioner Selig will be available online within the next 48 hours at baseballhall.org. Again, we congratulate you, Mr. Schuerholz, and we look forward to seeing you tomorrow morning.

John Schuerholz: Thank you, Jon, and I feel the same. I'll see you tomorrow morning.

Jon Shestakofsky: Great.

Operator: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. That does conclude today's conference call. We thank you for your participation and ask that you please disconnect. Have a great day.

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